

§ 14.633

38 CFR Ch. I (7–1–12 Edition)

(2) Act with reasonable diligence and promptness in representing claimants. This includes responding promptly to VA requests for information or assisting a claimant in responding promptly to VA requests for information.

(c) An individual providing representation on a particular claim under § 14.630, representative, agent, or attorney shall not:

(1) Violate the standards of conduct as described in this section;

(2) Circumvent a rule of conduct through the actions of another;

(3) Engage in conduct involving fraud, deceit, misrepresentation, or dishonesty;

(4) Violate any of the provisions of title 38, United States Code, or title 38, Code of Federal Regulations;

(5) Enter into an agreement for, charge, solicit, or receive a fee that is clearly unreasonable or otherwise prohibited by law or regulation;

(6) Solicit, receive, or enter into agreements for gifts related to representation provided before an agency of original jurisdiction has issued a decision on a claim or claims and a Notice of Disagreement has been filed with respect to that decision;

(7) Delay, without good cause, the processing of a claim at any stage of the administrative process;

(8) Mislead, threaten, coerce, or deceive a claimant regarding benefits or other rights under programs administered by VA;

(9) Engage in, or counsel or advise a claimant to engage in acts or behavior prejudicial to the fair and orderly conduct of administrative proceedings before VA;

(10) Disclose, without the claimant's authorization, any information provided by VA for purposes of representation; or

(11) Engage in any other unlawful or unethical conduct.

(d) In addition to complying with standards of conduct for practice before VA in paragraphs (a) through (c) of this section, an attorney shall not, in providing representation to a claimant before VA, engage in behavior or activities prohibited by the rules of professional conduct of any jurisdiction in

which the attorney is licensed to practice law.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 501(a), 5902, 5904)

[73 FR 29873, May 22, 2008]

§ 14.633 Termination of accreditation or authority to provide representation under § 14.630.

(a) Accreditation or authority to provide representation on a particular claim under § 14.630 may be suspended or canceled at the request of an organization, individual providing representation under § 14.630, representative, agent, or attorney. When an organization requests suspension or cancellation of the accreditation of a representative due to misconduct or lack of competence on the part of the representative or because the representative resigned to avoid suspension or cancellation of accreditation for misconduct or lack of competence, the organization shall inform VA of the reason for the request for suspension or cancellation and the facts and circumstances surrounding any incident that led to the request.

(b) Accreditation shall be canceled at such time as a determination is made by the General Counsel that any requirement of § 14.629 is no longer met by a representative, agent, or attorney.

(c) Accreditation or authority to provide representation on a particular claim shall be canceled when the General Counsel finds, by clear and convincing evidence, one or more of the following:

(1) Violation of or refusal to comply with the laws administered by VA or with the regulations governing practice before VA including the standards of conduct in § 14.632;

(2) Knowingly presenting or prosecuting a fraudulent claim against the United States, or knowingly providing false information to the United States;

(3) Demanding or accepting unlawful compensation for preparing, presenting, prosecuting, or advising or consulting, concerning a claim;

(4) Knowingly presenting to VA a frivolous claim, issue, or argument. A claim, issue, or argument is frivolous if the individual providing representation under § 14.630, representative, agent, or attorney is unable to make a good

Department of Veterans Affairs

§ 14.633

faith argument on the merits of the position taken or to support the position taken by a good faith argument for an extension, modification, or reversal of existing law;

(5) Suspension or disbarment by any court, bar, or Federal or State agency to which such individual providing representation under § 14.630, representative, agent, or attorney was previously admitted to practice, or disqualification from participating in or appearing before any court, bar, or Federal or State agency and lack of subsequent reinstatement;

(6) Charging excessive or unreasonable fees for representation as determined by VA, the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, or the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit; or

(7) Any other unlawful or unethical practice adversely affecting an individual's fitness for practice before VA.

(d) Accreditation or authority to provide representation on a particular claim shall be canceled when the General Counsel finds that the performance of an individual providing representation under § 14.630, representative, agent, or attorney before VA demonstrates a lack of the degree of competence necessary to adequately prepare, present, and prosecute claims for veteran's benefits. A determination that the performance of an individual providing representation under § 14.630, representative, agent, or attorney before VA demonstrates a lack of the degree of competence required to represent claimants before VA will be based upon consideration of the following factors:

(1) The relative complexity and specialized nature of the matter;

(2) The individual's general experience;

(3) The individual's training and experience; and

(4) The preparation and study the individual is able to give veterans benefits matters and whether it is feasible to refer such matters to, or associate or consult with, an individual of established competence in the field of practice.

(e) As to cancellation of accreditation under paragraphs (c) or (d) of this section, upon receipt of credible writ-

ten information from any source indicating improper conduct, or incompetence, the Assistant General Counsel of jurisdiction shall inform the subject of the allegations about the specific law, regulation, or policy alleged to have been violated or the nature of the alleged incompetence and the source of the complaint, and shall provide the subject with the opportunity to respond. If the matter involves an accredited representative of a recognized organization, the notice shall include contact with the representative's organization. When appropriate, including situations where no harm results to the claimant or VA, the Assistant General Counsel will provide the subject with an opportunity to correct the offending behavior before deciding whether to proceed with a formal inquiry. If the subject refuses to comply and the matter remains unresolved, or the behavior subsequently results in harm to a claimant or VA, the Assistant General Counsel shall immediately initiate a formal inquiry into the matter.

(1) If the result of the inquiry does not justify further action, the Assistant General Counsel will close the inquiry and maintain the record for 3 years.

(2) If the result of the inquiry justifies further action, the Assistant General Counsel shall:

(i) Inform the General Counsel of the result of the inquiry and notify the individual providing representation under § 14.630, representative, agent or attorney of an intent to cancel accreditation or authority to provide representation on a particular claim. The notice will be sent to individuals providing representation on a particular claim by certified or registered mail to the individual's last known address of record as indicated on the VA Form 21-22a on file with the agency of original jurisdiction. The notice will be sent to accredited individuals by certified or registered mail to the individual's last known address of record as indicated in VA's accreditation records. The notice will state the reason(s) for the cancellation proceeding and advise the individual to file an answer, in oath or affidavit form or the form specified for unsworn declarations under penalty of perjury in 28 U.S.C. 1746, within 30 days

from the date the notice was mailed, responding to the stated reasons for cancellation and explaining why he or she should not be suspended or excluded from practice before VA. The notice will also advise the individual of the right to submit additional evidence and the right to request a hearing on the matter. Requests for hearings must be made in the answer. If the individual does not file an answer with the Office of the General Counsel within 30 days of the date that the Assistant General Counsel mailed the notice, the Assistant General Counsel shall close the record and forward it with a recommendation to the General Counsel for a final decision.

(ii) In the event that a hearing is not requested, the Assistant General Counsel shall close the record and forward it with a recommendation to the General Counsel for a final decision.

(iii) The Assistant General Counsel may extend the time to file an answer or request a hearing for a reasonable period upon a showing of sufficient cause.

(iv) For purposes of computing time for responses to notices of intent to cancel accreditation, *days* means calendar days. In computing the time for filing this response, the date on which the notice was mailed by the Assistant General Counsel shall be excluded. A response postmarked prior to the expiration of the 30th day shall be accepted as timely filed. If the 30th day falls on a weekend or legal holiday, the first business day thereafter shall be included in the computation. As used in this section, *legal holiday* means New Year's Day, Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and any other day appointed as a holiday by the President or the Congress of the United States, or by the State in which the individual resides.

(f) If a hearing is requested, it will be held at the VA Regional Office nearest the individual's principal place of business. If the individual's principal place of business is Washington, DC, the hearing will be held at the VA Central Office or other VA facility in Washington, DC. For hearings conducted at

either location, the Assistant General Counsel or his or her designee shall present the evidence. The hearing officer shall not report, directly or indirectly to, or be employed by the General Counsel or the head of the VA agency of original jurisdiction before which the individual provided representation. The hearing officer shall provide notice of the hearing to the individual providing representation under § 14.630, representative, agent, or attorney by certified or registered mail at least 21 days before the date of the hearing. Hearings shall not be scheduled before the completion of the 30-day period for filing an answer to the notice of intent to cancel accreditation. The hearing officer will have authority to administer oaths. The party requesting the hearing will have a right to counsel, to present evidence, and to cross-examine witnesses. Upon request of the individual requesting the hearing, an appropriate VA official designated in § 2.1 of this chapter may issue subpoenas to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of documents necessary for a fair hearing. The hearing shall be conducted in an informal manner and court rules of evidence shall not apply. Testimony shall be recorded verbatim. The evidentiary record shall be closed 10 days after the completion of the hearing. The hearing officer shall submit the entire hearing transcript, any pertinent records or information, and a recommended finding to the Assistant General Counsel within 30 days of closing the record. The Assistant General Counsel shall immediately forward the record and the hearing officer's recommendation to the General Counsel for a final decision.

(g) The General Counsel may suspend the accreditation of a representative, agent, or attorney, under paragraphs (b), (c), or (d) of this section, for a definite period or until the conditions for reinstatement specified by the General Counsel are satisfied. The General Counsel shall reinstate an individual's accreditation at the end of the suspension period or upon verification that the individual has satisfied the conditions for reinstatement.

Department of Veterans Affairs

§ 14.635

(h) The decision of the General Counsel is a final adjudicative determination of an agency of original jurisdiction and may be appealed to the Board of Veterans' Appeals. The effective date for cancellation of accreditation or authority to provide representation on a particular claim shall be the date upon which the General Counsel's final decision is rendered. Notwithstanding provisions in this section for closing the record at the end of the 30-day period for filing an answer or 10 days after a hearing, appeals shall be initiated and processed using the procedures in 38 CFR parts 19 and 20. Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the Board's authority to remand a matter to the General Counsel under 38 CFR 19.9 for any action that is essential for a proper appellate decision or the General Counsel's ability to issue a Supplemental Statement of the Case under 38 CFR 19.31.

(i) In cases where the accreditation of an agent or attorney is cancelled, the Office of the General Counsel may notify all agencies, courts, and bars to which the agent or attorney is admitted to practice.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 501, 5902, 5904)

(The Office of Management and Budget has approved the information collections requirements in this section control number 2900-0018)

[53 FR 52422, Dec. 28, 1988, as amended at 72 FR 58012, Oct. 12, 2007; 73 FR 29874, May 22, 2008]

§ 14.634 Banks or trust companies acting as guardians.

Banks or trust companies, corporate entities, acting as guardians for claimants, may be represented before adjudicating agencies as authorized representatives of claimants by an officer or employee, including a regularly employed attorney, if the employee or attorney represents the corporation in its fiduciary capacity.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 5903, 5904)

[43 FR 46535-46537, Oct. 10, 1978. Redesignated and amended at 57 FR 4104, Feb. 3, 1992; 68 FR 8547, Feb. 24, 2003]

§ 14.635 Office space and facilities.

The Secretary may furnish office space and facilities, if available, in

buildings owned or occupied by the Department of Veterans Affairs, for the use of paid full-time representatives of recognized national organizations, and for employees of recognized State organizations who are accredited to national organizations, for purposes of assisting claimants in the preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims for Department of Veterans Affairs benefits.

(a) Request for office space should be made by an appropriate official of the organization to the Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs facility in which space is desired and should set forth:

(1) The number of full-time paid representatives who will be permanently assigned to the office;

(2) The number of secretarial or other support staff who will be assigned to the office;

(3) The number of claimants for whom the organization holds powers of attorney whose claims are within the jurisdiction of the facility or who reside in the area served by the facility, the number of such claimants whose claims are pending, and the number of claims prosecuted during the previous three years; and

(4) Any other information the organization deems relevant to the allocation of office space.

(b) When in the judgment of the Director office space and facilities previously granted could be better used by the Department of Veterans Affairs, or would receive more effective use or serve more claimants if allocated to another recognized national organization, the Director may withdraw such space or reassign such space to another organization. In the case of a facility under the control of the Veterans Benefits Administration or the Veterans Health Administration, the final decision on such matters will be made by the Under Secretary for Benefits or the Under Secretary for Health, respectively.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 501(a), 5902)

[53 FR 52423, Dec. 28, 1988. Redesignated and amended at 57 FR 4104, Feb. 3, 1992; 68 FR 8547, Feb. 24, 2003]